

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Walter G. Schuck,  
United States Army,  
World War II  
2003

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**Schuck, Walter G.**, (1918- ), Oral History Interview, 2003

User copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **ABSTRACT**

The Loganville, Wis. native discusses his World War II service as a member of Company C, 362<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 91<sup>st</sup> Division serving in North Africa and Italy. He touches upon basic training at Camp White (Oregon), landing at Oran in Northern Africa, lack of suitable drinking water, and drinking wine rather than water. Moving into Italy, he mentions seeing horses abandoned by the German artillery, military life in Italy, and having a soldier in his unit accidentally killed by American fire. Schuck describes his anger and disgust with the Army and the Red Cross for not forwarding his mail to him while hospitalized and not informing him of his father's death in a timely fashion. He reflects on his military career saying that when he returned home, rather than focusing on the past he "took a new lease on life" and comments that service gave him a better understanding of the world.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Schuck (1918- ) served with the 91<sup>st</sup> Division during World War II. After the war he returned to Wisconsin.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

## Interview Transcript

- John: All right, this is John Driscoll and I am a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Today is December 4, 2003. And this is an oral history interview with Walter Schuck. Walter is a veteran of World War II, the United States Army, in Europe. Walter, thanks an awful lot for coming in to the Veterans Museum, and agreeing to the interview. If we can go to the beginning, would you tell us where you were born, and when, Walter.
- Walter: In Sauk County. Address was Loganville. June 30, 1918. Parents was Augustus and Minnie Schuck, and I was the last of five children.
- John: Okay.
- Walter: Education, eighth grade.
- John: Farm family?
- Walter: Yea. What we were doing was farming. And it was because I was drafted. I guess it was the thing to do, so I didn't have that many feelings about it. And I entered in Milwaukee.
- John: When, Walter? When did you go in?
- Walter: The end of October.
- John: Of 19?
- Walter: That is a good question.
- John: Was the war on when you went in, or did you go in before it?
- Walter: Yea. There, I am all confused.
- John: That's okay. Don't worry about it. You went in, in Milwaukee?
- Walter: Yea.
- John: Okay.
- Walter: Into the Army infantry. Why did I do it? Well, I didn't have a choice. They did say, "Would you have any objection to being in the ground forces? Ground crew of the Air Force," and I said no, so they put me in the infantry.
- John: Okay.

Walter: Basic training was in Camp White, Oregon. And then we went on maneuvers, in the middle of the desert. I think it was in the eastern part of Oregon. And then when we came back, we went to Camp Ord, or Fort Ord, or something. It was a regular camp facilities. Training for the war, I guess. How long, I don't know. I should know but I didn't keep records of that stuff.

John: Sure. What division were you with?

Walter: I got in the 91st Division.

John: 91st. Okay.

Walter: B Company, 362 Infantry.

John: Okay.

Walter: I can't read my own scribbling here.

John: Don't worry about that.

Walter: Well, I don't know.

John: Just from what you recall, some of the things about basic training and that?

Walter: Well, I had a fractured metatarsal, I guess, so then they kind of put me on permanent KP [Kitchen Police], or something. So they transferred me into the Headquarters Company and that seemed to be a lot easier because there were trucks. If you had to move, you went in a truck, whereas where I was before, you was a foot soldier all the way. You had to walk wherever you went.

John: Then you were at Fort, Camp Ord?

Walter: Yea. I'm fuzzy on that.

John: That's okay. And then any other training before you went overseas?

Walter: No. Of course, we took our training out in Oregon state, so you kind of thought you might go to the Japan area, but that's not the way the Army operates. So they shipped you all the way across the country, over to Fort Patrick Henry, Virginia. Spent a couple of days there, getting oriented. Then they shipped us out of there, out on I guess they called them Liberty ships. To take you overseas, and that was a slow process, because they had to zig and zag across the ocean, to avoid detection, or something.

- John: They weren't built for comfort.
- Walter: No. But, one good thing, different things, was it favored the privates that time. The officers and the sergeant, even, had to do the KP duty on the ship, and the privates could pretty much do what they wanted to. So that was something different.
- John: Yea.
- Walter: But, the officers, they couldn't give you close order drill or anything on there. It was too crowded, so they, I don't know how the Army figured out they could do the KP, but they did.
- John: I don't know, either.
- Walter: And, of course, the water was always salty then, so no matter how often you washed, you still felt salty.
- John: Yea. Oh, yea. When you got to Europe, where did you land?
- Walter: We landed in North Africa.
- John: Okay.
- Walter: Oran, I guess they called it. There the water wasn't fit to drink, hardly, so after the days work was pretty well done, the commander would go out with the Jeep and with five gallon water cans to a winery, and get them filled with wine. So then we could line up with our mess cups and each get a good fill of wine to replenish our lack of moisture that we had all day.
- John: Were you in training in North Africa, or were you in combat there?
- Walter: No, we were supposed to be, I guess we were supposed to be training for small craft landing in Italy, but, of course, we didn't know where. But anyway, we took the training and as it turned out a British ship took us from Africa to Italy, and then when we got on the landing place in Italy, then the horrors of war really struck home because here was laying on its side was a United States ship that we used as a gang-plank to walk into Naples. So, it was getting kind of rough, there.
- John: Yea, sure.
- Walter: My memories are fading.
- John: That happens to us all. You went ashore in Italy at Naples?

Walter: Yea.

John: More training, or did you go north? Or what?

Walter: Well, let's see. That was sort of a replacement depot for the forward troops. We spent a little time there, I guess, and then we went north to Rome. Rome had just been taken by Americans, then.

John: Okay. Were you still in the headquarters unit in Italy, or did that run out?

Walter: By then I think I was in B Company.

John: Okay. Take your time. [Long pause.]

Walter: Well, memorable instructors, our buddies, Lieutenant Masters is there, and he always seemed to be on the side of us privates, because he figured he only had so many miles in his feet. If he could get out of these rat races and nine-mile hikes, or whatever they dreamed up for us, then he would get out of it. And, of course, his platoon would, too. Sergeant Fuller was, you know, he was, he seemed to be more bucking for the privates' comfort than the sergeants. So he was otherwise considered pretty easy going.

John: The early time that you were in Italy, that was mostly training, again? Training, marching, what?

Walter: Somehow I can't seem to think of it.

John: Okay.

Walter: That's terrible. Can't see and can't--

John: That's okay. Just general things, early on in Italy, how did you live? Tents? Barracks?

Walter: I think we had tents.

John: How about the food?

Walter: The food was regular Army chow, that's about it. I can remember as soon as the war was over, they shipped us over to Trieste, on the corner by Yugoslavia, and that was about the first time when we had Army life. The old regulars said the Army in peacetime was like, everyday in the Army in peacetime was like Sunday on the farm. You know, you had certain chores that you had to do and the rest of the time you did pretty much what you wanted. And there in Trieste, it was about the first time I ever felt like we had enough men to do what we were supposed to

do. Otherwise, we was always overworked and had more things you were supposed to do than you could handle.

John: Oh, yea. You were in some of the fighting in northern Italy? Well, I say northern.

Walter: Yea, from Rome up. Across the Arno River. One thing I remember when we got near to the northern part of Italy, by then the Germans were abandoning their artillery, or they didn't have enough, anyway, they had horses they had let loose and they were grazing there in the area. They used horses to haul their artillery. I think I should have had this interview a couple of years earlier because my mind is going so bad now, and my vision is so poor.

John: Don't worry about that. We're getting the story here. This is fine. Any special friends you made while you were in Italy? Any buddies?

Walter: Well, there were a few. There was about three I can recall. Wayne Thompson and Howard Ragsdale, and Philip Labrador. But Labrador died a few years ago, now. And Thompson was transferred into a different part of the Army, I guess. But we had some kind of reunion for the 91st, Thompson was still there. And Ragsdale is one I still contact.

John: Yea. Where does he live?

Walter: He lives in Junction, Texas. His idea of keeping current is writing every two years, and mine is every time you get a letter, you ought to answer it. But he just thinks he is keeping current if he writes every two years. And I moved around so much that, there for a while, we had lost track. But he thinks he is keeping track of me but if he only writes every two years and I move every year, why, we don't connect. But now we're back. He writes every now and then and sends a picture, and we do, too. He's got a three thousand acre ranch in Texas and a few sheep. Mostly Angora goats.

John: Walter, were up in that part of Italy, and up near Trieste. Did you ever meet the Russians?

Walter: No. No, we didn't. We met the Yugoslavs, and they seemed to be easy to deal with at that time. I guess they had a Confrontation with Tito, or whatever his name was. But we didn't have any problems there.

John: After Italy, where did you go?

Walter: How come I can't remember?

John: Did you go to southern France?

- Walter: No.
- John: No, okay.
- Walter: I guess the big push was in southern France but we didn't go there.
- John: Were you at D-Day in Normandy?
- Walter: No.
- John: You didn't do that. Okay.
- Walter: We were on a forgotten front, I guess. After Italy surrendered, they thought the war was over, but the war wasn't over in Italy as long as there were Germans with guns.
- John: Yea. Did you do a lot of tracking them down, after that?
- Walter: Yea.
- John: After the war, when you got back, I assume discharge and then back to civilian life, and that? You didn't stay in the Army?
- Walter: No. I didn't stay in the Army. I guess I had it in the back of my mind that I would go to Chicago and look up this buddy of mine that got killed. And talk to his parents, and see what I could do to console them. Because he was really, his head was half blown off and he was still living. Of course, he died the next day. But anyway, I never got there because then my love of my life, I guess you would say, she was coming up to keep house for my older brother. And that kind of a big change in my life from then on. I kind of, instead of worrying about the past, I just sort of took a new lease on life and I guess we felt mutually. Fell in love and lived happily ever after. The 6th of December this year we will be married fifty-six years.
- John: That's wonderful. Oh, great. When you got out, Walter, did you join the American Legion, the VFW? Any of the veterans organizations?
- Walter: Not right away, I don't think, but I did join later. I still get benefits from the Legion. I forget just what it is. I think it is on prescription drugs or something that they contribute something.
- John: When you got out of the service, you had the GI Bill. Did you ever use that, education or house, or that?
- Walter: That is another place where, if it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all.



John: Okay.

Walter: In order to get the educational benefits, in my case, I was a farmer, so there was other people that were farmers, but the one qualification, well, you had to have an operating farm in order to get the educational benefits, and somebody was taking over his dad-in-law's farm or something, he was right there in the chips. He could get this GI education. And the farm training, and all that stuff. But I didn't have that, so I didn't get the training.

John: Let me flip this over, Walter.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

Okay, this is Side 2 of Tape 1. So you didn't, couldn't tap into the GI Bill benefits, then, because you didn't own a farm? I didn't know that. I see. Okay.

Walter: Yea, everybody, everything has a regulation and, of course, they go by them, at least in my case did seem to.

John: What did you do when you came out? Did you go back to farming?

Walter: Yea. Gee, there was something that I wanted to tell about but I can't read my notes.

John: May I take a look?

Walter: Yea. I don't think you can cipher it, either.

John: Okay, you shipped to Oran. Okay, the U. S. ship laying on its side, you mentioned that. Ah, what was your rank when you came out? Were you still a private?

Walter: Private First Class.

John: Private First Class, okay.

Walter: That was as high as I got.

John: Yea. Okay. When you have a chance, looking back over all these years, how do you feel about having gone and done this? Your life was interrupted, you were taken away from your life. What is your feeling about it?

Walter: Well, I think I learned something about the rest of the world and it gave me a better understanding of a lot of things. Of course, I always was one that liked to see the new country, even if you are on a covered personnel carrier, or a truck,

whatever. Most people would be dozing off right away, but I would be see if I could look out and see some country I hadn't seen yet. So I kind of enjoyed that part of it.

John: When you came back, you were in three years, was it?

Walter: Yea.

John: Problems getting back to civilian life?

Walter: No, I don't think so. Well, nobody would believe you if you did tell them something, so I gave up.

John: That's true. Yea, that's true.

Walter: A neighbor of ours, of course he was a draft-dodger and I guess I was telling him about the cows, in Italy, they had, of course, the rich farmers had a horse and maybe a steer, maybe, to pull their wagons and carts. But those poor people had to use their regular milking cow to pull their carts. And of course, this draft-dodging neighbor of mine, he laughed at that. "Hey, they don't use cows for pulling. They use steers." Well, a lot he knew about it. Once the war takes your fat steer away, well, you better use the cow.

John: While we are thinking here, let me make out this release I need. What this will do, it lets the Museum make this available to students, writers, people doing that. Today is the fourth day of December, 2003. And it is Walter, I am going to shut this off for a minute. [Pause.] To wrap up here, without going into details if you don't want to, just general thoughts about your time in Italy?

Walter: I just wish we could have done this a year or two sooner because I can't see and I can't hear, and I can't remember half the stuff. I mean, I remember stuff at night, I am dreaming about this and that. First year I dreamed all night about it. Now I dream all kinds of weird stuff.

John: One of the things some of the other fellows I've talked to mentioned while they were over is the USO shows, and entertainers and that. One of the fellows here mentioned Bob Hope had gone over and talked to them. Did you ever see any of that?

Walter: No. You heard about them. They were supposed to be somewhere in the country, but never near enough for us to go to.

John: Okay.

Walter: I don't think it was Hope. There was another group of, about four singing girls, I

guess, that I vaguely remember, but I know they told us about it. But it wasn't where we could get. A lot of that stuff, of course, I can't give you names and numbers of the roads and the hills because they went on Highway 101, or whatever. Well, we were never traveling on the roads. We were traveling through the stumps and the hills and the rocks. If you wanted any protection, you had to dig your own slit trench. If you wanted to sleep, you picked out the soft side of a rock for a pillow. That was my experience. I don't know, people say, "Why don't you write about the good times?" My kids, I got five kids, and I wrote quite a bit of my history and some of my Army stuff. He says, "Why don't you write about the good times?" Well, maybe he remembers good times, but I am just basically writing it like it was, and if they weren't good times, that is the way it happened.

John: When you came back, after the war, Walter, did you come back with your unit, or did you come back on your own?

Walter: I forget that. I think that was the one time I had points to spare. I mean, everything went by points, and, you know, there was a lot of them in the unit then, because we had about a hundred and fifty per cent replacements, so most of them came after me. And so they didn't have nearly the longevity points and whatever things counted for points, so that was one time I had plenty of points to get out, whenever the day came. It was supposed to be the duration plus six months. Well, you know, you wouldn't object to that because that is what signed up for. But it so happened that was one time I had more points than most of them around me, so I got out ahead of them, by myself, not as a unit.

John: Yea.

Walter: I don't know if the unit went to Alabama or someplace afterwards.

John: During your time in, were you ever sick or wounded? Or hospitalized?

Walter: Yea. Yea, I was hospitalized in Naples, and then Rome. In Rome hospital, when I got in there, the people who came in with me, they'd ask, "What is the address here?" And they said, "You don't need to know the address here. Your company knows where you are. They'll get your mail forwarded to you." Well, they wouldn't give up until somebody told them, 44th General Hospital, Naples, or something like that. And but me, following orders, I just used my company address, and pretty soon the people at home got their mail returned saying "Wounded, present address unknown."

John: Oh, boy!

Walter: So they are not going to write any more. If they do, they'll use the same address. So I got hardly any mail. But those that defied the regulation and insisted they know, well, they got the address of the place and they got mail in a little while. So

that is another thing. I gradually learned that it doesn't pay to follow the details and the directions too good. But, trying to be a good soldier, I just did. Not that I had as many writing to me anyway, but I had some.

John: Earlier, did Gayle say something to me that you had a problem with the Red Cross while you were in? Was that you?

Walter: Well, yea, it could be. My father died in November and it was February by the time I found out about it.

John: Oh, wow. Oh.

Walter: And my father's minister was supposed to be the local representative for the Red Cross, so you would think that, by his extra pull or not, I should have been notified. I got a letter from the doctor saying he didn't have long to live. He had cancer of the bladder and didn't have too many months to live. And that is what I had for hope, to live on. Well, it turned out that he died in November but I didn't get the news till February. So much for the Red Cross. They bragged too, they keep in touch with the servicemen. When they bring you a piece of writing paper every once in a while, like they come around, that is all I got out of them.

John: Okay. You know, this is a remarkable story. You guys went and, like I say, you saved the world. Before we wrap up, anything that you might want to add on to this, Walter? Take a minute or two if you want to think.

Walter: No, I guess I can't. I guess there is nothing else to say.

John: Let's see, we talked about reunions and the VFW, the GI Bill. Okay, a great story. I am glad you took the time to come down.

Walter: I don't know, I think I wrote some of it up. I wrote a book about my family and a section about my Army life. Or what happened. This one place, when we were, well, maybe I told you that.

John: Go ahead.

Walter: The company called for artillery to be placed in this area ahead of us to soften up the enemy, which was kind of a common practice, but our artillery company figured we can't be that far. We made pretty good progress that day. But the artillery company figured we weren't that far, so instead of putting the artillery where we wanted it, they put it where we are.

John: Oh, my God.

Walter: That is when I lost another good buddy. Because he was a BAR man [Browning

Automatic Rifle] and he was proud to carry that extra-heavy weapon. So our own fire killed him. And I am sure that's not the first time that happened, that someone was killed by our own fire. But it kills just as hard.

John: Oh, yea. Oh, yea.

Walter: But that was kind of hard to take, but you had better take it. Take the bitter with the better.

John: Yea, I know how heavy the BAR was because every time my big mouth would get me in trouble, they'd give me two of them and tell me to run a mile. So I knew how heavy they were, because I had a big mouth that always got me in trouble. Okay, what I will do, Walter, I will transcribe this in the coming weeks. With the holidays and that, it will probably be after the first. When I get it typed up, I'll send you a copy.

Walter: Good.

John: And if you see anything in it that is wrong, that I get wrong, or if you get some ideas of thoughts back that you want to add, give them a call here and you can talk to them right over the phone and dictate it. But, this is a remarkable story. You guys, as I say, you were giants. You went off and saved the world. That's exactly what you did. Okay, great story.

[After the interview ended and the recorder had been put away, Walter told me about being wounded by an air burst, wounded in the leg. He was treated with sulfa powder that dried and got so hard that it had to be cut out. He went back to his company and spent several days in a pup tent and developed hepatitis and jaundice and this laid him up in the hospital for several months. I told Walter that I'd add this to the end of the interview when I transcribed it.]

**[End of Interview.]**